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OLD MOSCOW, The King of the Trappers.

By JUDSON S. GARDNER.



THE WOLVES DASHED ON SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE FOAMING HORSE—GLARING UPON THE BRAVE GIRL WITH THEIR SAVAGE EYES!

OLD MOSCOW, THE KING OF THE TRAPPERS.

By JUDSON S. GARDNER.

CHAPTER I.

TRAPPED.

"What in Heaven's name is the matter with you, Old Moscow?"

"Why, the cussed Injuns have stolen the girl!"

"What girl?"

"Why, the pooty girl we saw last week at ther emigrant's camp," said Old Moscow, a trapper well known in the frontier settlements, and far Western hunting-grounds, where the wild horse and buffalo yet roamed unalarmed by the shrill whistle of the white man's locomotive.

"Stolen her, Old Moscow! It can't be possible! But tell me about it," said his comrade, who had been impatiently waiting his return for hours.

Old Moscow flung himself from the horse he had ridden until covered with foam and dust, stretched himself at full length and rapidly made amends for his long continued hunger and thirst.

"Thar's not much ter be told," he jerked out between the huge mouthfuls. "Last night, while they war ersleep, ther yaller thieves came and stampeded ther stock and run them off, and what am worse, took ther girl, and left her old father and mother er cryin' and wringing thar hands hopelessly."

"What do yer intend ter do about it?"

"It haint no business of mine. My trade haint dealin' in scalps nor gals, though I haint quite innercent of ther fust. But she spoke so sweet, and was kind ter the old man, and I kinder hate ter know that she's got ter be ther wife of a Injun."

"But you will not leave in ther hands of ther redskins one who was so kind ter you?"

"I haint said yet that I whar goin' ter let ther Injuns carry off ther gal without tryin' ter save her, but——"

"Then we will go at once."

"You jump toward ther end like er unbroken colt, and would grab ther bait without lookin' ter see whether thar wasn't steel jaws under it. One must have ther cunnin' of er wolverine, ef he would git erlong in this world, and yer know they'll git caught ef ther line of traps am long ernuff. Besides, yer know ther beaver dam we found yesterday?"

"What has that ter do with it?"

"We mought get fifty skins," was the reflective answer; "and they would be worth——"

"You are ther very last man, Old Moscow, I should have thought of comparin' sich things ter er woman, and she er beauty."

"I didn't do nothin' of ther kind," replied the old man, blazing up with anger.

"But you war talkin' of them, and——"

"Wal, put out ther fire, take ther traps and hide them in ther holler of yonder tree, and put my private mark on it so that we kin find it ergin—clear erway all signs of er recent camp and git ready ter start."

"To take ther trail?"

"No. If it be our duty ter try and save ther gal it am jest as much ter take keer of ther old folks. I told them ter keep quiet, and not move until I saw them ergin, and that they couldn't well help doin', fer ther thievin' redskins didn't leave a single huff ter travel on. Yet that don't matter. They kin have ours fer ther time bein'. We sha'n't need any hosses."

"I don't fancy travelin' arter Injuns erfoot."

"You won't need ter."

"I should like ter know why?"

"Becase I shall go erlone."

Mentally vowing that he would not remain as guard for the bereaved parents, the younger trapper hastened to comply with the instructions he had received, and they rode swiftly toward where the anxious father and mother were waiting. Then his manhood was shamed into guiding them to a place of safety.

Old Moscow remained behind with his iron frame standing as motionless as a statue—with his hands resting upon the muzzle of his long, heavy rifle until they were lost to sight. Then he carefully examined both his weapons and the ground, and started upon the most dangerous trail of his life—one which was far more than likely to end in a death of torture!

Though many hours had elapsed, Old Moscow was not long in deciding upon the proper direction to be traveled. His trained eye could distinguish by signs that would have been unnoticed by the majority of men, the foot-prints of a horse that must have been heavily loaded, and guided in a measure at least while the rest had been left uncontrolled. At first he thought it was but a subterfuge to mislead him, but he soon became convinced that such was not the fact.

He stooped down and examined still more closely for a few moments—knelt and parted the grass so there would be nothing to obstruct the view—measured the length and depth of the steps carefully, and with a smile flashing across his face, started with the long, swinging lope that years of use had rendered natural, and that carried him swiftly along. Yet night came on. Then he seated himself in mid-prairie, ate of the frugal stores he always carried with him, drank very sparingly from his little canteen, and without any covering save the sky, lay down to rest.

Once or twice his slumbers were disturbed by the rush of a wolf-driven deer; but the long hours passed without serious molestation, and with the first of light he was again afoot, and noon brought him to the spot where the Indian had camped and cooked his rude breakfast.

He examined everything with the utmost attention—remarked particularly the method in which the sticks had been laid in building the fire—the foot-prints, and where the warrior and girl had rested. A book could not have been more plain to a scholar, and he could have told with wonderful minuteness, and just as clearly as if he had been present, all that had passed.

Without wasting any more time than was necessary, he again started upon his journey, and with feelings deeply interested, traveled at a speed that almost, if not quite, equaled the horse he was following. And soon he was astonished by the sight of the animal slowly picking his way back. Instinct—it might almost be called reason—was guiding him, and he would have continued upon the trail until he had arrived at the spot where he had last seen his master, had he not been intercepted. But startled at the sight of a human figure suddenly presented before his vision, he threw his head high in the air, snuffed suspiciously, wheeled, darted off to a little distance, stopped, and began pawing the earth uneasily.

A sudden movement or advance upon the part of the trapper would have instantly caused him to put many rods between them, if he had not altogether disappeared. But Old Moscow was horse—as well as wood and prairie—wise. He stretched out his hand invitingly, and remained as motionless as if carved from marble, knowing that curiosity would overcome fear, and that the horse would advance—slowly, it might be, but certainly until his nose touched his flingers. The secret that no horse is afraid of anything he has once had the opportunity of smelling was well known to him as it is to all true Western hunters, and he patiently awaited the result.

He was not mistaken. Circling around, but constantly drawing nearer, the animal approached, drew back, approached again, touched the motionless fingers, became more bold, and at length permitted the hand of the trapper to glide softly up from the black muzzle and rub the eyes and ears and pat him familiarly. That accomplished, Old Moscow was not long in detaching his belt and slipping it around the still arched neck, so as to effectually prevent escape, though without the slightest movement to make him timid or alarmed. It must be perfect friendship and trust between the hunter and his steed, and their bond of union must be love.

That finally established, Old Moscow led him into the cover of the bushes, placed him so that he could feed at ease, and then began to make a critical examination. But the moment he did so, an exclamation of terrible alarm burst from his lips:

"Blood! Blood! then thar has bin er foul deed done, and I have found ther end of my trail without even gettin' ter it. Yes," he continued, as he turned the horse around, so that the sunlight would fall on the spots of deep crimson clearly defined upon the light sorrel hide. "Yes, ther red devil has become tired of guardin' his captive, or she has tried to git away, or he was afeard she would become ther prize of some other warrior, and he has buried his tomahawk inter her beautiful head, and torn away her scalp, with its long, silken har, even when she was trustin' him ther most. May ther good Lord forgive him, ef it be His pleasure, but I never will. Yes, it is all jest as plain as er otter slide at low water. Ther hoss become frightened at ther smell of blood, threw ther copper completed murderer, and run away, even while he was butcherin' ther poor gal."

His view of the matter was a very correct one under the circumstances, and especially as he was confirmed in it by finding a few threads of fine, woman's hair mingled with the coarser ones of the horse's mane. If the struggle he fancied had in

reality taken place, such a thing would be very likely to occur, and upon closer examination he found them, also, stained and clotted with blood, and it would have needed the tongue of an angel to have convinced him that the girl had not been brutally scalped—had not fallen a victim to either the jealousy or revenge of the Indian.

With the greatest care he gathered every particle of the glossy and golden hair, cleansed it from stain, braided it with the utmost nicety, wrapped it in fresh leaves and placed it in the bosom of his hunting-shirt. He would preserve the little braid with all of a miser's care and lover's tenderness, but it would simply be to give it to the poor, old, and as he firmly believed, childless parents, and the rough hand he drew over his eyes attested the depth of his feelings. But very soon his temper underwent an entire change, and sorrow was lost in the thirst for vengeance.

"I war all wrong—all wrong," he muttered, vindictively, through his set teeth; "ter think of my trail havin' come ter an end. Even ef ther poor girl am dead, I've got much to do. I must find ther mangled body and bury it, ef ther wolves have left ernuff, and then I must find ther Ingin. And when we do meet, then——"

What he intended to do was told by the manner in which he clutched the stock of his rifle and the handle of his knife, not by words. Almost before the sentence could have been finished he was again upon the trail. Not, however, until he had freed the horse and started him upon the course he was going when he arrested his progress. The majority of men would have taken him as an aid to their journey, but Old Moscow was too crafty—too well versed in Indian character to do so foolish a thing. An American horse was far too valuable to be lightly lost, and he would certainly be trailed, and to divert him from his natural instincts would be to give notice of the presence of an enemy.

The halt he had made occupied some time, and he again pressed rapidly forward, until he came to the spot where the ground had been torn up by struggles, and was plainly marked by blood. There he found fragments of a woman's dress, more strands of shining hair, and the marks of a body having been dragged toward a neighboring stream.

With a strange feeling of awe, such as he had never known before, he crept to and looked over the rocky brink, hoping and yet fearing to find the object of his search. It was some distance to the bottom—the water clear and running smoothly, and he was not long in deciding that there was no corpse lying beneath the tide. Yet he hesitated about following any farther. Certainly no Indian ever took so much trouble before, and why should this one? He pondered long upon the mystery, but there was no way to unravel it save by investigation, and he began reluctantly to descend.

"It hain't nateral," he grumbled—"hain't nateral, and I'm a fool ter think on doin' it, fer I'm next to sartin thar am er trap somewhar. Yet thar am no other way ter find out what has become of ther gal—and that's jest what I am here fer."

Nothing could have deterred him after that thought. He swung himself lightly down the uneven face of the rocks, and began to slowly make his way to the bottom. To accomplish it needed a strong hand, quick eye, and sure foot, and he was more than equal to the task under ordinary circumstances. But just as he was midway he saw a sight that made him forget his customary caution, and he came very near falling.

Lying between two sharp rocks, in a position that prevented its being seen from almost any other point, was the body of the poor girl of whom he was in search! She lay with her face turned from him—her hands apparently resting under it—the long hair streaming like threads of gold over the white shoulders—whether scalped or not he could not determine, but the limp form was positive evidence to his mind that no life remained.

"He has sartinly killed her," he groaned out from between his clenched teeth, "and then dragged her erlong and thrown her down so that she couldn't easily be found. Wal (with a heavy sigh) thar's nothin more I kin do fer ther poor soul but ter bury her, say a word er two of prayer, and then——" and his brow darkened—"then follow ther Injun—find out who he war, and send him arter her upon ther long, dark trail."

He descended still farther, but found it necessary to lay aside his rifle and use both hands, and bend down so as to reach the corpse. He looked anxiously around, and listened long and attentively. All was the most perfect silence. It could not be that any danger was lurking near, and placing his trusty weapon carefully aside he stretched himself at full length by the side of the little cleft in the rocks, and extended his arms downward. But he could only reach the body with the tips of his fingers, and was endeavoring to reach still lower when, in an instant, his wrist were grasped by an iron-handed warrior upon either side, and he was held as in a vise, while others sprang upon him from behind, and tied him beyond the possibility of resistance.

Then he was rudely drawn to a level space, and in a moment after the girl was lifted from the little chasm and placed so that he could not only see she was unscalped but alive and uninjured!

All was plain to him now, and he cursed himself for being deceived. The girl had been placed as a bait and he trapped. But he had little time for thought. As soon as the insidious foemen had given vent to their joy, both captives were forced to their feet and hurried away to the mountains.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEATH-STRUGGLE.

The carnival of gluttony and brutality that always follows the taking of prisoners and stock by the red men lasted for two days. At least they did not sufficiently recover from its effects to give any attention to the male prisoner until that time. Then, as they had determined that Moscow should die a death of torture to give *eclat* to the marriage of the white girl with their chief, they went to the wigwam where he had been left, and to their intense astonishment, found that it was empty.

A dozen of the braves would have sworn that he had been left bound in the strongest manner, and not one could even surmise how he had managed to get free. And greater still was their surprise when they ascertained that the girl, also, was gone. And there was no one who could have enlightened them besides the prisoners and an old squaw, who was the most fiendish in her outcries at being thus robbed of the pleasure of the anticipated torture. Gold (for the old trapper was frugal of his earnings), and his little canteen of fire-water had worked upon her avarice and thirst—the bands had been loosened and they had crawled away under the cover of the darkness, and were miles upon their homeward journey before their flight was discovered. Then all was confusion, and horses were mounted and runners dispatched in every direction.

From the moment of their leaving the vicinity of the wigwams the fugitives had pushed forward at their utmost speed, pausing only to rest as the delicate constitution of the girl required, and to procure some food, of which the trapper stood in great need, he having been entirely without since his capture, and indeed for many hours before. With hunger appeased, though not satisfied, they started again, and night brought them in sight of a range of high hills.

To press on in the darkness was simply to court danger, and as soon as Old Moscow found a place suited to his mind he announced his determination to stop, very much to the regret of his fair companion. But she might as well have talked to stone. Without the slightest answer he gathered the softest branches to make her a bed, and placed others thickly around to screen her from the wind.

Having seen that she was as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, he withdrew a little distance, placed his back against a tree, and prepared to pass the night.

If he had been armed, as was usually the case, he would have thought nothing of it. But it was strange after so many years of frontier life, to be even for a single instant where he could not place his hand upon rifle, knife and hatchet, and he missed them sadly. And never before had he so much realized the dangerous life he was leading. This was partly from having a girl under his care, and partly from being weaponless, and their combined effects made him excessively cautious and fertile in expedients.

Without the slightest noise he stripped off his hunting-shirt, found a log, stretched the one over the other, bound it around with his belt, placed his cap upon it, leaned it against the tree, and hid himself in a neighboring clump of bushes. It was an old ruse, as he well knew, yet might serve an important purpose—especially if the clouds continued to obscure the moon.

But never had he passed such long and tedious hours. It seemed as if the morning would never dawn, and it required all his self-control to keep from rising and wandering about. And more than once he was upon the point of going to see if the girl had not been spirited away—if no harm had come to her. But he knew it would not do—that others might be watching as closely as he was, and that the least exposure of his person might bring about the very end he had so much reason to fear.

Another hour passed, and he knew by the stirring of the birds in their nests that it would soon be day; and he was thanking himself that he would soon be able to see his way, when his keen ears caught an unusual sound—the crackling of branches under a heavy—though cautiously placed—foot. He knew it might be bear or Indian, but in either case the danger would be imminent, for save his naked hands he had no means of defense. A very brief time made the matter clear.

The dark form of an Indian came stealing softly through the bushes, and a single glance told him that, though it was not

the chief who had abducted the girl, it was one equally dangerous—a broad-shouldered, brawny, savage warrior.

"Ef I only had even er knife," he muttered, almost aloud, "I'd soon put er end ter this night prowlin' reptyle, and thar'd be er good chance for er funeral. But he sha'n't lay er finger on ther golden-haired scalp of ther gal anyhow, unless my time has come; and then may the blessed angels take me hum."

The quick eye of the Indian noticed the recently cut and arranged bushes. His woodcraft told him that none ever grew exactly in that fashion, though so craftily had they been placed that even he was for a moment, deceived. With the light tread of a prey seeking panther, he drew near and knelt down; he parted the bushes gently and looked within. Then, in spite of his habitual caution, a murmur of gratification escaped his lips. But he was far too cunning to disturb her slumbers. If she was to be found thus, the trapper would not be very distant; and rising again, he looked searchingly around. The counterfeit man met his sight; he crouched, drew his knife and placed it between his teeth, grasped his tomahawk firmly, and disappeared.

"He's ergoin' ter creep eround like er snake and strike ther poor man in his back!" silently laughed Old Moscow, so well was he pleased with the result of his plan.

Then he followed the example of his subtle enemy, and crept along to gain his rear.

But it was very slow work for both, and faint light was beginning to streak upward in the east before the Indian had reached the tree, and with a rapid whirl of his hatchet had driven it deeply into what he supposed to be the head of his sleeping enemy. Instantly the fraud was discovered, but so powerful had been the blow that the tomahawk was not easily drawn out again, and before it could be accomplished the trapper (who had calculated upon this), had sprung forward and grappled with him.

Then began such a terrible battle as but few have witnessed—as has never taken place save upon the far Western frontier, when the dauntless, roving white hunter and the savage red man meet, with little probability of life for either—a wild-wood duel unmatched by any other of earth.

Though taken at a disadvantage, the Indian warrior quickly regained his lost ground. His giant strength baffled the efforts of the trapper to pinion his arms, and though he could not absolutely tear himself away he so far broke the hold as to grasp his knife and strike furiously. Yet it was with little effect, for the wary eye and rapid changes of body of his antagonist, rendered abortive all attempts to reach a vital point. For the slight flesh wounds Old Moscow cared nothing—indeed, could scarcely be said to have felt them.

For a long time the battle was continued without a sound escaping the lips of either. But for the knife it would have been a simple trial of strength—a wrestling match. Now, however, the advantage was greatly upon one side, and Old Moscow was not slow to realize the fact. He saw that unless the scales could be more equally balanced he would be certain to get the worst of the encounter. He felt blood dripping from more than one wound, which, though it might be slowly, would certainly drain away his strength, and at last make him an easy prey, and instantly a desperate purpose was formed and executed.

It was to give his muscular arm as a fair sheath for the weapon, and either break the blade or wrench the knife from the grasp of the Indian.

That he might lose his arm he well knew, and that if he did not the pain would be terrible, but he gave it no heed or second thought. It was no time then to think of future contingencies or after suffering, for unless he speedily changed the tide of battle death would put an end to both.

And calmly as if he was about to do the most matter-of-fact thing in the world, Old Moscow watched for the opportunity to carry out his desperate purpose, and when it came he released his hold with and extended his left arm and received the heavy blow. He felt the cold steel pass through it, and by a sudden and powerful twisting, he broke the blade away close to the handle and resumed the struggle with it sticking firmly in the solid flesh!

Now, indeed, it became a hand-to-hand battle; and nearly equally matched, it was long and desperately continued. A looker-on could scarcely have seen any advantage gained by either party, and accident alone could decide it. A single false step—the slacking of the grasp for an instant and it would be all over for one or the other. Their strength was momentarily growing less—each was doing his utmost to choke the other! And suddenly the hands of the Indian relaxed, and without a groan he fell backward and lay rigid in death.

For some time Old Moscow, so near was he, also, to the grave,

scarcely comprehended that the battle was over. Life had been almost choked out of him, and he staggered to a tree and leaned against it. But with his senses partially restored he looked wildly around, glanced at the prostrate Indian, and then at the spot to which the struggle had brought it. It was some distance from where they had at first grappled—was but a few steps from where a wall of perpendicular rocks rose hundreds of feet above the valley beneath. Had the struggle lasted but a few moments longer, and they gone a few feet farther, they would have fallen over the brink and both been crushed into a never-to-be-recognized mass or torn into countless bloody atoms!

After a silent prayer for his escape, the old trapper applied his teeth to the broken blade and attempted to draw it out. Lodged among the muscles of his upper arm, the slightest motion of it caused him to shudder and grow pale. Still, there was no other course, and the longer it was delayed the more difficult and painful would be the operation. Had his companion been other than a girl he would have called upon her for assistance, but he knew she would be useless, and more than likely faint at the sight of his situation. Left thus entirely to himself, his efforts became still more desperate, and after great bodily suffering the keen blade was at last drawn out, and in the petulance of the moment he threw it far over the cliff.

But well would it have been had he retained it against the hour of need!

The thought flashed through his brain the instant he had committed the act of folly. It was totally unlike the man, and he still in a wilderness, far from friends, surrounded by enemies, and without food or the means of procuring it. But it was too late now to repent, and his smarting wounds forced themselves upon his notice. To gather strips of bark and spiders' web was but the work of a few moments, and resuming his seat he stanching the blood and bound up the cuts.

Something, however, startled him, and he looked wildly around. He could distinctly see the body of the dead Indian, but it appeared as if it must have drawn nearer to him—that there was not the same space between them as when he last gazed upon it. He rubbed his hand quickly over his eyes and looked again, but could discover nothing, and smiled at the folly of his thoughts. The man had certainly fallen dead, and how could he stir? Still he was not satisfied, and though amid the conflicting emotions of his unexpected escape he might have been mistaken as to the location of the corpse, he was determined not to be so again, and carefully noted its position by the surrounding trees.

Had he not felt very much weakened by the severe strain upon his muscles and the copious flow of blood, he would have gotten up, gone to the body of his fallen foe, and at once satisfied himself as to whether his eyes had deceived him. That he determined to soon do. But first he would recover his breath and strength, and feeling faint, he bowed his head upon his hands and closed his eyes. Yet, careless as he apparently was, his ears were keenly sensitive to every sound, and scarcely five minutes had elapsed before a strange sound arrested his attention. Too crafty to raise his head, or alter his position, to give the slightest intimation that he was aware of any change in the noises of the woodlands, he remained as motionless as the rock upon which he was seated, and listened.

A few moments convinced him that something or somebody was moving in his immediate vicinity. Reflection satisfied him that it must be the girl, and he smiled that he had not thought of it sooner. It was fully daylight, and no matter how tired she was, her anxiety would not permit her to slumber soundly when it was more than time that they were resuming their journey. He started to his feet, looked quickly around, and then reeled back, as one who had received a heavy blow.

The corpse had entirely disappeared.

Quick as lightning it flashed through his brain that the man had been only stunned—partially choked—that he had recovered sufficiently to creep into some hiding-place, or—and the thought was madness—had stolen to the side of the sleeping girl and murdered her. He turned to go and learn the worst, but even as he did so his late antagonist sprang upon, grappled with, and endeavored to push him over the dizzy cliff.

A few moments sooner he might have succeeded, almost without a struggle. Now Old Moscow was in a measure prepared for the assault, and their hands were fastened upon each other at the same moment. But it was not the purpose of the Indian that the battle should be as protracted as the former one had been. Had he succeeded in crawling behind his enemy before being detected, he would have instantly hurled him over the precipice, to be crushed upon the rocks hundreds of feet beneath. Now, it might be that in order to accomplish his purpose he would have to give up his own life. And he would not hesitate to do so, for never was passion more at a white heat. At the best he was the rival of the trapper in strength and endurance, and now he had every advantage—more perfect rest, no loss of

blood, and of position, for the white man was between him and the brow of the mighty cliff!

If he could retain this last advantage he must certainly conquer. All there was for him to do was to keep firm footing, and push the trapper back, step by step—even inch by inch would answer, for the distance soon narrowed down to a few feet. But despair, added to the never-quailing courage of Old Moscow, made him an enemy hard to cope with, and he was the very last to yield while a particle of life remained.

But slowly, though surely, the Indian was pushing the trapper toward the brink of destruction, and a grim smile played over his savage features as he redoubled his exertions and hastened to put an end to the no longer doubtful battle. For Old Moscow was rapidly growing weaker, his resistance more feeble, his breath more faint, his knees trembling under him, and his feet slipping. He felt that for him the trail had indeed come to an end—that the dividing line between him and eternity had narrowed down to almost nothing—that a few, very few more pulsations of the heart, and his sun would be darkened by the grave.

But yet there was no cowardly giving up. If the Indian was to win—and he knew that he must—it should only be at the last moment, and besides, he had a duty to do—a fearful responsibility resting upon his shoulders. He must warn the girl (if still alive) of her danger, and give her an opportunity to escape before it would be too late, and for the first time loud shouts burst from his lips, as he called to her to save herself.

The war-cry of the Indian rang forth in answer—then changed into a ring of triumph, and his eyes flashed forth the fires of gratified revenge. With startling dexterity he transferred his hands to the throat of the exhausted trapper, and even as the wretched girl darted toward them with hands and voice uplifted in horror, the red warrior forced his antagonist to the very outmost limit of the firm ground, and he fell backward over it.

Fell, but even as he was doing so his legs became entangled in the rock-locked roots of a tree, and sustained his weight as he hung head downward, while the force the Indian had used to the final accomplishment of his purpose, and the sudden giving way of resistance on the part of Old Moscow, carried him entirely over, and he was suspended above the deep gulf, sustained only by the grasp upon the throat of the man above him.

Never was there a more terrible situation. But as if there was not yet sufficient of horror, when the giving away of the tree roots would hurl both down—when the slipping of his hands would send him whirling through the air for hundreds of feet only to fall upon the sharp and ragged points of the rocks—serpents that had been disturbed in their dens shot forth their hideous heads and spitefully thrust their forked and venomous tongues into the very face of the Indian.

These things—so terrible in description, but a thousand times more so in reality—the horror-stricken girl saw for an instant, and then fell to the ground insensible, while the living swung like a pendulum over the chasm from the dying, for Old Moscow was in the last stages of strangulation, and the serpents hissed and rattled their scales, and darted forth their tongues like red lightning.

CHAPTER III.

WANDERING IN DARKNESS.

Concealed by the thick bushes into which she had fallen, the poor girl lay for a long time, knowing nothing of what was passing around her; but when sensibility again returned, the full terrors of her situation instantly forced themselves upon her bewildered brain, and she trembled at her future.

With the caution she had learned of Old Moscow during their brief and rapid journey, she slowly arose, looked around, and listened. There was nothing to be seen or heard, and she began again her hopeless journey.

Noon came, and the hot sun parched still more her lips, and appeared to make her blood boil in the veins—night and the heavy dew and cold wind chilled her form, until her bones seemed ice. All her desperate struggles to gain home were ended now. She could go no further. She had finished the last foot of her earthly journey unless assistance came, and that speedily. She reeled and fell. Her eyes grew dim and her brain clouded. Strange thoughts floated through it, until her intense longings were condensed into, and found utterance in the single word:

"Water!"

For a brief season tired nature gave way, and she slept, though only to dream such terrible, startling dreams, as caused her to start up suddenly. And again and again this was repeated, until even as the mad desire for drink became too terrible to endure, the sense of blessed gratification stole over her swimming

brain—cool, sparkling water was held to her lips, and she drank such a draught as no one save the shipwrecked sailor or one in the same situation as herself ever dreamed of. She drank, opened her eyes, saw who had given the water to her, and sank back again into the arms that were holding her.

The young man at her side was of fair face and strong form, and the look of anxiety showed how very deeply his feelings were interested—showed what it would have crimsoned his face to speak—the true state of his heart. His dress, and the arms he carried, revealed the trapper, and his knowledge of the woods that he was no novice.

"Heaven be thanked," he murmured, from lips almost as colorless as those of the girl whose head he pillowed tenderly against his swiftly beating heart, "that my steps were guided to this spot whar her precious form war lyin, and that she am not dead. But ef she should die!"

Crushed by the thought, he laid her gently down, brought more water, and bathed the ashy face—held the improvised cup of bark to her trembling lips, and silently prayed, as he had never done before, for her restoration. And at length his efforts were crowned with success. The blue eyes opened, the form was gently raised—rich blushes mantled the soft cheeks as she saw how closely she was held, and the change from utter despair and almost death to safety, and the promise of life acted like a charm.

"Philip! Philip Lee!" she exclaimed, though in the softest of whispered words. "Heaven must have guided you. But had you been an hour later you would only have found my—my corpse!"

"Yes, it must have been Heaven—or, as Old Moscow would say, your good angel. But whar am he? How did you come here?"

"Old Moscow," she answered, pointing reverentially upward, "is with the angels."

"Dead!"

"Give me some food—let me gain a little strength and I will tell you the sad story. I am dying of hunger; for over two days not a single mouthful has passed my lips."

"Merciful Heaven! You starving ter death, and Old Moscow already dead!" and the iron frame of the man shook like one in convulsions.

But he hastened to produce his little store of dried venison and parched corn—brought a fresh supply of water, murmuring the while against the coarseness of the fare, and that if she would but wait he would procure something better fitted for her delicate nature.

As well might he have asked the starving wolf or winter famished bear to wait; as it was he had to use gentle force to keep her from bringing death by the very food she had so much longed for. He knew the danger of over-eating after so long a fast, and when the keen edge of the appetite was somewhat blunted he refused to give her more, and asked again for the particulars of the death of his old friend.

"He died for me," was the tearful answer; and she solemnly repeated the story.

"But the cussed Injun died with him!" answered the young trapper, his face lighting up with enthusiasm, though it instantly afterward darkened with revenge.

"Yes, they must have had one fate, and so horrible that it makes my blood run cold even to think of it."

"Thar'll be more Injuns die!" was the vindictive response.

"He war the truest and best man that ever followed er trail; and though I know ef any man war ever taken hum to glory he war, yet his old bones wouldn't rest in peace ef he wasn't revenged. But thar's time enuff fer that. Now I must get yer out o' ther woods, and back ter—"

"My dear father and mother. Oh, tell me of them!"

"It'll be er blessed day when they have yer back in thar arms, fer they am mournin' powerful bad, and ther last words yer poor mother said when I cum away was that she'd never see her Maggie agin."

And conversing with each other, they almost forgot their still perilous situation, until the whistling of a bullet put a sudden ending to their ideal dreams of happiness, and the young trapper fell backward with a heavy groan, the girl screaming and clinging to him.

But in an instant she was torn away and hurled to a distance, the half-risen trapper knocked senseless by the blow of a tomahawk, and bound hand and foot. Then she was rudely lifted from the place where she had fallen, and saw to her dismay that she was again in the power of the chief who had first abducted her—he whom Old Moscow had told her was most cruel and brutal of all his tribe—To-ho-pe-ka or Horse Shoe—the war-chief of the Sioux.

But no time was given for thought. Lifting the senseless body of her lover in his arms the Indian drove her before him

with his hatchet until he reached his horse, threw his burden upon it, and guided her back to a captivity that was worse than death!

CHAPTER IV.

FROM DEATH UNTO DEATH.

From the moment of his fall Old Moscow gave up every hope of escape, for though he had been in many a desperate situation, none had ever rivaled this. Suspended between heaven and earth, deprived of the use of his hands, with the heavy weight of the Indian hanging about his neck like the nether millstone, and producing strangulation, it would have been madness to think of escape. He tried to pray, but nothing could escape his lips. Even had he been hanging there alone his situation would have been bad enough with the blood all rushing into his head, and death would soon have followed; now it must be almost instantaneous.

But he was mercifully deprived of feeling even before he had time to fully comprehend all the terrors with which he was compassed; hung as a dead man until the hands of the Indian released their clasping, and the body plunged down to a living death. Yet even when the compressing power about his throat was gone, the old trapper knew nothing until the almost expired life surged up again within him, and he found himself lying under a tree with a body of Indians drenching him with water.

Never had a man been so literally rescued from the jaws of death, and never had one more curiosity to know how it had been accomplished, but for the time he was dumb. It was hours before his bruised throat, and swollen lips and tongue would answer the will sufficiently to articulate, and by that time he had been brought back to the very prison wigwam from which he had mysteriously escaped. As soon, however, as he could articulate he began to question his guards.

The story was short but plausible. The conflict had been witnessed by several of their number who were following upon the trail; they had been near when he had fallen, and hastened to the rescue, and though too late to save the one of their own blood, had succeeded in saving him, and taken the most ready means to restore him to sensibility.

On the evening of the third day of his captivity, a stir in the village told of some unexpected and gratifying events, and placing his eyes to a chink in the bark covering of the wigwam, he saw that which caused a greater chill of horror to pass through his frame than the knowledge of his own certain and terrible fate had done.

Riding in triumph into the village came the great chief, dragging behind him by ropes placed around their necks and fastened to the saddle, were two prisoners, with hands tied, and the first glance showed him that they were the beautiful girl for whom he had risked his life, and his favorite companion, the young trapper, Philip Lee.

Then the blood of the old man fairly boiled, and his feelings found vent in the strongest words of indignation and scorn, though uttered under his breath.

"The mean, sneaking dogs!" he said, "ter drag er woman by the neck; and the poor boy, too. Ef ever thar war er tribe that deserved to be sent hullsale ter perdition, it am ther Sioux, ther miserable cut-throats. But I do hope ther boy won't be fool er-nuff ter let on that he knows me. Ef I kin only make them think that we am strangers, and git them ter put him in the same wigwam then!" But seeing that one of the braves was drawing near, he continued aloud, "Whom are they draggin' along like er dorg?"

"Do you not know him?" was the quick question.

"Me know er fellow that hain't got no more pluck nor that? Before I'd suffer such disgrace, I jist drap down and be strangled to death. Me know him? I hope they won't disgrace me by puttin' such a coward in the same wigwam."

But such appeared to be the determination, for the moment Lee was released from his not only disgraceful, but dangerous position, he was led thither, notwithstanding the protestations of Old Moscow, and rudely thrown down and bound. This appeared to have been the order of the chief who had made both him and the girl prisoners, as it would require double the number of guards to watch them if separated. And it was well that the young trapper was quick-witted, and understood that they were to appear as strangers, for there were a dozen pairs of sharp eyes fixed upon them, and the least change of expression would have been fatal to the plans of Old Moscow. Still he did not hesitate to talk, and after rating his companion soundly upon the ignominious manner in which he had been brought into the village, he questioned him as to how, when, and where he was captured, and learned all he wished to know.

"Wal," he said, "you've got to die, and all the advice I've got

to give yer is not ter disgrace yer white blood, but die like er man. But don't talk any more. I hate cowardly boys!"

The rest of the day was passed apparently in the most sullen silence, yet they managed to converse at intervals, and Old Moscow thoroughly posted his friend. But when night came—and unfortunately it was one of extreme storm and darkness—they managed to get their heads near together, and whispered without restraint. Then the plan that Old Moscow had formed at the first sight of Lee was matured and acted upon. Though tied hand and foot, the deer-skin strings were not proof against the sharp teeth of a determined man, and in a much shorter time than would have been deemed possible, the old trapper had the full use of his hands, and had given freedom also to his companion.

To have put themselves out of the way of danger was then an easy task, and they would have laughed at being overtaken had it not been for the captive girl. Now they would either save her or lose their own lives.

Hastily stripping off the blanket from the dead brave whose body had been placed in the wigwam with the prisoners, and wrapping himself up in it, the old trapper disappeared in one direction, while his companion stole like a shadow in another. Whatever they intended to do must be done quickly, and five minutes had not elapsed before a wigwam was in flames at the farther end of the encampment, and a hostile war-whoop rang through the woods.

With a dexterity that appeared like magic hundreds of armed warriors sprang toward the point of alarm, while the squaws ran hither and thither making night hideous with their yells. But all too soon the subterfuge was discovered. No volley of arrows and bullets came from the timber, and the wigwam was speedily extinguished. But another, and still another, blazed in different parts of the encampment. Yet they were too valueless to demand attention, and a rush was made by the warriors for the prison house, to find that also in flames.

Then each intuitively knew what had happened, and rushed for their horses to scour the country, and cut off the fugitives. But a few followed the chief to where the girl had been confined, to find the two old squaws who had guarded her—one of them the mother of the chief—quivering in the agonies of death, and the girl missing.

Outwitted, beaten at every point, with the fire communicating from wigwam to wigwam until half the village was burning, the great Horse Shoe acted like one bereft of his senses. He stamped the earth in impotent rage, tugged at his scalp-lock as if he would tear it out by the roots, and cursed his followers, forgetting how much depended upon speedy action. But he was not long thus. He choked down his rage, and having secured his horse, dashed madly away, with the blazing homes of many of the red men illuminating the forest so that he could see for a considerable distance.

With the feeling that he had baffled any that might follow, the old trapper was journeying along, though with all possible speed. For the first few miles he, too, had ridden, but as soon as the greatest danger had passed, he dismounted in order to relieve the overburdened horse and make him last as long as possible. And now that he had a little of clear prairie before him, he began to feel comparatively easy, and was talking almost gayly to the girl—save his regrets (more than shared by her), that Philip Lee was not with them.

"Ther Lord has bin very good ter us," he said; "He brought us out of great danger."

"But poor Philip," answered Maggie Grey, sorrowfully.

"Ther boy am smart and will take keer of himself. I don't think he's in any more danger than we am, and—oh, heaven!"

The report of a rifle, the whistling of a bullet, and the heavy thud as it struck his shoulder, caused the exclamation, and before he could determine from whence the shot had come, the chief of the Sioux dashed forward, fairly rode him down, and trampled him under foot. But the trapper was not to be crushed into the dust like a worm without turning and stinging, and a quick blow of his hatchet effectually ham-strung the horse so that warrior and steed rolled together upon the prairie.

"Go!" shouted Old Moscow to the girl. "Go! Ride fer yer life, and leave ther old man ter die," and he threw himself upon the Indian and exerted all his strength to keep him from becoming disentangled and following.

But the frightened girl might not have taken the advice had the matter been left entirely in her own hands. Such, however, was not the case. The horse she rode, alarmed by the shot, was terrified by the frantic struggles of its wounded mate, the floundering of the men, and above all by the smell of blood, and dashed madly away with the rider clinging with her arms around its neck—a half-wild steed running away with a helpless, half-fainting girl. Away from strife that must bring death to one or both, and the last thing she saw was that the Indian had

thrown the trapper upon his back—had his knees firmly planted upon his breast—one brawny hand upon his throat, and was whirling his hatchet with the other for the last fatal blow.

CHAPTER V.

WOLVES ON THE TRAIL.

A brave girl, and brought up upon the frontier it was not very long before Maggie Grey awoke to the exigencies of her situation, and felt that it would be necessary to guide the frightened horse, or his instinct would guide him homeward, and she would be carried back to the village of the Indians.

She raised herself to a secure position, turned the horse upon the course she knew lay in an opposite direction to the home of the red men, and encouraged him with hand and voice.

But soon a new danger menaced her. Her horse trembled, she felt a sudden straining upon the rein and saw dark forms stealing around upon every side, red balls of fire flashing from out the gloom, understood the cause of his terror in an instant, and sank back with a groan of despair.

"Surrounded by wolves! Oh, Heaven!" she gasped.

Like an arrow the horse darted away out into the open prairie, the girl clinging to him and caring nothing in what direction she journeyed so as to distance the savage beasts.

But the poor girl saw with increasing terror that the wolves were gaining upon them, that the speed of the horse was sensibly diminished, and she did her utmost to force him forward. As if feeling that another and more precious life than his own depended upon it, he responded by a magnificent burst of speed, and for a time held his own in the race. But it was useless—useless. It was only protracting misery.

She raised up as far as possible and looked with exceeding anxiety around. Directly ahead, but so far as to be but dimly discernible, was another belt of timber. If she could only reach that she might cling to some of the branches and swing herself into a tree.

With cheering cries she urged the panting steed onward. Yet he would have needed no urging had speed and power remained in his limbs. Alas! they were no longer supple, and his breath was growing short.

"Oh, Heaven!" gasped the wretched girl, "if I could only reach the woods!"

She could now distinctly see the waving of the green branches—could distinguish tree from tree—could almost pick out the branches she could easily reach, the ones that promised safety and life. Scarcely a half-mile remained between her and them!

But every instant the wide-mouthed beasts were crowding nearer, until they ran side by side with the foaming horse—glaring upon her with their savage eyes and licking their huge jaws as they snuffed the swiftly coming feast. The horse, brave to the last, made a desperate rally, but his strength was short-lived.

The wolves dashed on in front and completely hemmed them in. There was no possibility of escape. The horse turned round and round, snorting with fear, and at last, with his proud spirit completely broken, he staggered, stumbled, reeled, and fell with a shrill neigh of agony, carrying the girl to the ground with him.

Then closer and more dense grew the dark circle of savage beasts, leaping, crawling, urging each other on, and yet cowardly waiting for one more bold than the rest to make the first advance. And seated upon the dying horse, with her hands upraised to Heaven, the despairing girl prayed that her death might be swift.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAVE IN THE ROCKS.

When the young trapper parted from his companion it was his idea to attract the attention of the Indians, and give Old Moscow a chance to rescue and escape with the girl. It was also his plan to secure a horse and join them. In that he was frustrated. The fire burned more rapidly than he had expected—the light reached to a greater distance, and the startled Indians had too quickly given their attention to the safety of the prisoners. But the cries of disappointed revenge told him that his old friend had been successful, and was carrying the one he loved away with him, and satisfied of this he began to think of his own critical situation.

Fortunately for him, the great majority of the Indians had followed after the other fugitives, and as soon as he was at a short distance from the blazing wigwams, he was in comparative safety. Yet there was nothing to assure him of this, and he hastened on with what speed he might until he suddenly found

his farther progress arrested. Yawning before him, he saw a deep chasm—a cleft in the old mossy rocks so deep, that active as he was, he dared not attempt to leap.

Crouching down, he bent over and endeavored to penetrate the gloom, but in vain. All that he could determine was that the ravine appeared to grow wider toward the bottom. Despairing of fathoming it or leaping over it he would have turned back, had he not fancied that he heard the cries of pursuing enemies.

He measured the distance again carefully with his eye, and shook his head in doubt. Still he could not stand thus idly. Something must be done, and that quickly. He glanced up and down the chasm, to learn if there was not some place more narrow—some point where his chances of success would be better.

He could distinguish no difference in the width, and just as he was bracing his nerves to try the fearful leap, he saw, at some distance, a tree that bent over the gulf and reached half way across it, and the light of hope flashed again within his eyes.

He gained the promised means of safety and made a careful examination. The tree had long been dead—had fallen from age and decay. Still, it was the only possible means of distancing his pursuers, whom he could now plainly hear.

One brief prayer for the girl he loved, rather than for himself, and he carefully crept out upon the swaying trunk. Lower and lower it sank for a time, and then remained groaning and quivering as he swiftly passed toward its topmost branches. He looked behind, and saw that the sapless roots were giving way one after another. He looked forward as he reached the extreme end, prepared himself and jumped with all his strength—struck upon the edge—slipped—renewed his hold—hung swinging in the air, and then succeeded by an almost superhuman effort, in reaching a firm place, even as the tree fell, with a noise like thunder, and the air was filled with clouds of dust and thousands of birds that had been swept from their roosts.

A fervent prayer of thankfulness arose from his lips as he thought of his narrow escape, and tearing off his hunting-shirt, he found a dry limb, wrapped it around and hurled it to the bottom. There was cunning in the act. It was one worthy of Old Moscow himself, as the result soon proved. Scarcely had he hidden before the faces of half a dozen Indians peeped out from the opposite side, drew near, and looked down into the black pit—saw the shattered tree and the garment, and drew back satisfied. There was not a doubt in their minds that the white man had attempted to cross upon the trunk, that it had given way, and that both had been crushed into atoms at the bottom.

The quick wit and courage of the trapper had saved him, and as soon as his enemies had disappeared he began looking around. Though he had reached a point that was covered by bushes, yet they but fringed the broad, flat rock he had seen from the other side, and skirting along its edge for a little distance he found an easy means of descent—so easy and regular that he was certain that the steps were not innocent of the repeated pressure of man's foot.

Near the center of the level plain was a curious pyramid, built of human bones, surmounted by a grinning skull—a pile six feet in height, and so placed as to be distinctly seen from all sides.

There was also a pile of stones constructed after the manner of a white man's oven, with a thick flat one for a cover, moldy and stained.

"By the heavens above!" exclaimed the trapper; and he turned pale at the thought, "this am one of them altars I've heard Old Moscow tell about, and that 'ar pile must be ther bones of ther poor that have been sacrificed to ther god they call Manitou! I've often heard them spoken of before; but never expected ter see one, and if I git safe out of this scrape I'll come back here some fine day, and bury the bones and take some powder and blow the hull concern ter thunder. Hello! what's that?"

He started back in alarm. For the first time in his life terror took absolute possession of him, and his stalwart frame quivered like an aspen leaf.

"Haunted! May Heaven have mercy upon me. It am the ghosts of the poor dead men. Thar bones hain't never been buried. I wouldn't be here in the night-time fer all the gold in the world."

A dismal groan caused him to quickly change his place for the sound came directly from under his feet.

"What, more of them? I shouldn't wonder if thar whar a a hull grave-yard down stairs, and—thar it am agin, and—but that doesn't sound as if it came from a dead man, and who kin tell but what thar may be some poor feller confined down in ther rocks until sich time as they may be ready tew butcher and burn him up."

Filled with this new idea some little of his cowardice vanished, and drawing near again to the altar of sacrifice he looked around

and under it. And very soon he became convinced that the horrible sounds came from beneath it, and that there must be a hidden communication with a cave. By the exercise of immense strength he removed one stone after another, and found that his idea was correct—that one of the stones and the most massive of all had been used as a door—been so placed as to conceal a rude pair of stairs. And now as he could plainly distinguish the sound of a human voice, his courage returned, and descending, he very soon came to a cavern of considerable extent.

But for all the bracing of nerves he was very near retreating again, for never did mortal eye rest upon a more hideous, ghastly object. Whether man or demon, he could not for the moment determine; but his first thought was that he had gained the vestibule of the lower regions. In an instant, however, the well-known tongue of the Sioux reassured him, and becoming convinced that it was no evil spirit his pulse became calmer and he began to look with unblanched face.

It was a man he saw—or, what once had been one—though bowed by age, and at the very last gasp of starvation. One who could not have seen less than seventy snows fall and melt away, but now the most meager of skeletons.

"In the name of goodness!" asked the astonished trapper, as he stepped toward the corner in which the living skeleton was lying upon the cold and bare rock, and almost devoid of clothing, "how came yer ter be shut up here?"

The wretched moaning ceased for a few moments, and the fleshless jaws and the parched tongue managed to articulate:

"The stone fell into its place; I was too old and feeble to raise it, and I am dying from hunger and thirst. My ears tell me that you are a pale-face; but for the sake of the Manitou give me food and drink!"

"Sartingly. I wouldn't deny that to er dorg. But first tell me who you are?"

"I cannot—cannot! My lips are sealed—give me water—water!"

"Whar kin I find any?"

"Toward the rising sun, half an arrow-shot."

The trapper picked up a bark cup, sprang out of the cave, and hastened to procure the life-giving fluid. But he was some time in finding the craftily concealed spring, and when he returned the soul of the Indian had been summoned beyond the dark river.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEDICINE MAN.

Though Horse Shoe, the great chief, had shot at and ridden down Old Moscow, and it had been his determination to carry away his scalp fastened to his girdle, yet the instant he saw that the girl had escaped, his purpose changed, and disarming him, he bound his hands.

It would not do to lose both prisoners. There was a possibility that the girl might meet some wandering hunters of her own blood, and if so, and he sacrificed Old Moscow to his vengeance, who would there be to satisfy that of his tribe?

"Let the pale-face get up!" he commanded, as soon as the flying girl had disappeared from sight, and he could sufficiently control his temper to speak in the firm voice worthy of his position.

"Wal," replied Old Moscow, composedly, "I don't know as thar am any use in lyin' here. But yer needn't crow over yer victory. I s'pose yer intend ter take me back ergin ter yer village and kill me arter yer own brutal fashion—that's it, hain't it?"

The Indian nodded his head in acquiescence, and with a gratified smile breaking the stern lines of his mouth, Old Moscow continued:

"Ef that am ther case, I want ter be in as good shape as I kin, and die like er man; so, ef it hain't too much of er favor, I wish you'd take yer knife and dig out ther lead. It kinder grates ergin my shoulder-blade."

Horse Shoe looked at him long and earnestly to see that no treachery was intended, gave a grunt of assent, motioned him to lie down, and at once performed the rude surgical operation.

"Now jest gather a few plaitain leaves and bind them on, and mayhap I'll be all right ergin ther time when yer want ter send my soul out of this world."

So well had he borne the intensely painful operation, that he forced the respect of the savage, and though it was an unheard-of thing, he lowered his dignity sufficient to comply with the request.

"The pale-face now will go," said the Indian, and sternly pointed to the place where the wigwams of his people were situated.

It was not long before they were met by a party of mounted

braves, and the chief giving Old Moscow into the care of a picked half dozen, with the strongest possible commands to look to his safety; took one of the horses, and followed by the rest, dashed swiftly again on the prairie.

It was a long distance back to the point from which he had started, and Old Moscow on the way was told that Philip Lee, whom he loved as a son, had fallen down a precipice while attempting to cross upon a rotten tree, and been instantly dashed to pieces.

The strict orders of the chief forbade Old Moscow's guards from taking his life, as they would most gladly have done, yet it was with great difficulty that they restrained the rest of the tribe from doing so when they came to the village. Indeed, so fierce was the tumult, that even the commands of the chief would have been disregarded had not the great medicine man of the nation stalked into the circle and forbidden the sacrifice. This was done without a single word, merely by the waving of his hand, and those who had been the loudest in their outcries but a moment before, shrank back trembling with fear.

He motioned them to a neighboring wigwam, followed, and saw that the prisoner was bound as one had never been before. Then he looked carefully to see that there were no chinks in the covering save the little opening above—bade them, by signs, to bring more robes and fasten them around—saw that they were pinned strongly to the ground—examined the thus doubly screened wigwam again and again, as he walked around it, and even yet did not appear to be satisfied that it would be proof against keen eyes. What could he mean by such preparations for secrecy?

Old Moscow felt a strange fear creeping over him. He was familiar with all the usual means of torture, but never had seen anything like this.

After the medicine man had completed all his arrangements for secrecy, he appeared to be in no hurry to take advantage of them, for he coolly sat down, drew forth his pipe, and began smoking. Then he slowly arose, and with the point of his staff traced a circle around, and at some distance from the wigwam, and by motions, told the red men that it was charmed, and that any one who dared to enter would instantly be struck dead by the evil spirit.

The medicine man had taken a vow not to speak until some task had been accomplished, and drawing still farther back they waited with the utmost impatience the next scene in that strange drama. But everything that followed was shut from their eyes.

The old trickster (after having procured a few blazing embers from the nearest fire), walked into the wigwam and carefully shut and fastened the door behind him. There was an interval of the most painful silence, and then strange waves of smoke arose and stole out through the opening and floated in waves of blue and green in the sunshine, while the sulphurous smell nearly strangled those who were nearest.

Another interval of silence so profound that they could almost hear the beating of their own hearts, and faint moans could be heard issuing from the lips of the prisoner. But soon they increased to yells—to the utterances of one in the most terrible agony. They continued for several minutes, died away, were resumed, grew fainter, and at last entirely ceased.

But though nothing could be heard, every eye remained fixed upon the wigwam. The horrible mystery that had been enacted there exercised a spell over them they could not break. Warriors, squaws and children seated themselves upon the ground, neglectful of everything else, looking like so many huge statues, until the door was again thrust aside, and the medicine man came reeling out into the open air. But even then they dared not question, though they would have given all they possessed to have done so. And they were even debarred from looking within, for the heavy skins were instantly dropped, and they were forbidden, by signs, to approach.

And yet once again the mystical circle was drawn around the prison wigwam, and the medicine man slowly disappeared in the woods in the same direction from which he had come, and they were left to the pangs of conjecture and ungratified curiosity, and vainly asked each other as to what horrible deed had been done.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

There could scarcely be found in frontier life a more desperate situation than that in which Maggie Grey was placed. A defenseless girl sitting upon a dying horse in the darkness, and surrounded by half-famished wolves.

Her fear was too great for even prayer to be long sustained, and the words died upon her ashy lips. She could not sit thus

calmly and wait to be devoured. Better die struggling, at least doing something. And might she not still keep them at a distance until the rising of the sun should cause them to shrink back to their caves and dens in the mountains? The thought came to her like an inspiration from Heaven, and tearing away a portion of her dress, she waved it around and screamed with all the strength of her lungs.

The effect was magical. Such utter silence had prevailed before that they were entirely taken by surprise and scattered in every direction. But they were far too sharp-set to be entirely driven away, and becoming accustomed to the noise and flutter, began creeping back again until they had resumed their former position, until she could almost touch them.

Yet she never for an instant neglected to keep the fragment of her dress waving, and watching for an opportunity to steal away, should the slightest chance offer, and gain the sheltering woods, while the beasts were gorging themselves upon the body of the horse.

She determined at last to try the forlorn hope; if that failed, farewell to life, and love, and earth.

With quick, shrill cries she raised herself up, the horse lifting his head at the same moment, and wildly waved her handful of rags. The wolves started back. She sprang forward—they opened the circle—she darted through—it closed again and she ran rapidly forward, casting a look over her shoulder and seeing with tears of pity the savage animals clinging to every part of the horse, and he fighting with teeth and feet, brave to the last and worthy of a far better fate.

Never did woman's feet fly over the ground with more rapidity. Yet once again she glanced back. The inclination to do so was irresistible. She saw that the struggles of her faithful companion were over; that he had been rended into pieces. But she saw, also, that some of the less strong of the wolves had been driven off; that they were following her, and when yet some little distance from the trees the entire pack burst in full cry, and rushed along like a living whirlwind!

A moment of the most terrible anxiety, of the most desperate effort, and (after tearing off and throwing back a portion of her garments for them to fight over) she reached the first tree, caught the lowest branches, climbed aloft, and gained a fork even as the mad beasts overtook her. She clasped her arms around the trunk and came near fainting and falling from excess of feeling and exertion. The disappointed beasts, still more frantic from their recent taste of blood, were leaping up, almost touching her, and the tree was so small that she dared not climb higher for fear of its breaking down. Even as it was the more desperate and strongest touched the hem of her dress, and a shoe that fell was so instantly shredded that she had the most striking warning of what her fate would be if she even for a single instant forgot her caution.

At last she grew more calm, as the certainty of safety was proved, and with a natural revulsion of feeling she even smiled at the futile efforts of her would-be devourers, and amused herself by breaking off branches and tossing them down amid the snarling pack. Yet it was such an experience as few would wish to pass through even once in a life-time, and she hailed the light with exceeding gladness, and her heart beat high with hope, when the bright sun tinged with gold every leaf and flower of wood and prairie, and the wolves stole away like shadows to vainly lick their hungry jaws until another night and other prey should come.

But it was long after the last had disappeared before she ventured down from her perch. And then she knew nothing of where she was or in what direction were the settlements of the white man. Yet she was happy in the thought that the Indians had lost the trail and she could travel without the fear of being followed, and searching for and finding a little spring, she took a long, refreshing draught and bathed her swollen face and aching temples.

With the necessity of rest forced upon her she sought a secure place, and at last found a hollow tree of sufficient size to admit of her crawling within. Then she gathered branches and bark and barricaded the opening so as to prevent any farther entrance, and curling up gave way at once to slumber.

For an hour she lay dreaming, and then became aware that something was stirring around the roots of the tree, and lay breathless awaiting a new development in the horrors of the woodland. At first she thought it must be a bear snuffing uneasily about, but was very soon undeceived by the sound of men's voices, and in another instant she decided that they were Indians, and the chief among them was him she dreaded most of all others—Horse Shoe! And yet even then a ray of light shot through the darkness, for she learned from their talk that they believed she was dead, and carefully crawling up to a little opening she looked out.

Around the tree were seated a half-dozen of her tormentors,

calmly smoking and discussing her fate. The hard-riden horses were tied near, and they evidently had prepared for a somewhat lengthy rest.

"The wolves," said Horse Shoe, "have left nothing of the young squaw but the few rags we found, and she of the skin like the snow and hair like the finest roots of the golden thread, can never fill the wigwam of the red man."

"And the young trapper has gone over the dark river," replied another.

"How?"

The story of the falling of Philip Lee with the great tree, and the sight of his body lying at the bottom of the deep gulf, was quickly told, and so terrible was its effects upon the listening girl that she came near falling, and could scarcely suppress a scream. Him she trusted and him she loved had both passed away, and she was now utterly alone. There was nothing between her and being forced to become the wife of the brutal Indian, save the frail shell of the tree, and any moment her footing might give way, or she fall, or the watchers around take a fancy to pull aside the branches she arranged, for would not their keen eyes discover the counterfeit of nature? But they gave no heed to such thoughts, and she hung until every muscle in her body quivered.

But again she forgot her sufferings for a moment as they talked of the old trapper—of his life having been spared, and did not feel entirely friendless even though he was far away and a prisoner. And yet, while dreaming of impossibilities she became aware that a new and startling danger had arisen—that little puffs of smoke were creeping up through the hollow tree, and finding vent above.

She looked out and saw that the very bark and dry twigs she had gathered had been ignited, and were beginning to burn rapidly, and felt that she must either make the Indians aware of her presence or be choked or roasted alive.

Still she was determined not to give up until the very last minute. By placing her mouth to the little opening she could obtain fresh air, and there was the ghost of a possibility of her surviving, especially as the red men were never known to make great fires for fear of telling their enemies of their whereabouts. But soon the smoke began to grow more dense. The heat, too, was growing fearful, and her garments were becoming scorched, and might at any moment burst into flames.

But if the smoke could find a free passage into the open air, why might not she do the same? At the risk of falling, she placed her hand over her mouth so as to prevent the black smoke from entering and filling her lungs—looked aloft, and could already distinguish a large hole much farther up—one that from its peculiar formation she was at no loss to determine was where the trunk separated into branches. Could she but reach it she might yet survive. Anything, no matter how desperate, was worth the trial, and by bracing her hands and feet she managed to gain a few inches—then slipped back again.

By this time the fire had grown hotter, and the interior of the tree was beginning to burn. And once fairly caught, the fire would rapidly gather strength and fierceness, and frantic with fear, she became less and less cautious, and the dead wood rattled down at every struggle.

The quick eyes of the Indians saw, and their quick ears heard the scratching within the trunk. They knew that it was hollow, and they instantly prepared their weapons and shouted joyfully:

"Muck-wa! Muck-wa!"

But if it was a bear, as they surmised, further measures would be necessary to drive it out so as to enable them to get a shot, and they began gathering and piling great armfuls of branches upon the fire. But even as they were doing so, the hands of the girl gave way and she fell a helpless heap to the very bottom of the tree!

A cry of alarm and astonishment burst from the lips of the warriors, and every rifle was sighted; but the quick eye of the chief saw that it was not a bear, and he exclaimed, "It is the pale squaw."

He dashed to the rescue, drew her forth, tore a blanket from the shoulders of one of the warriors, wrapped her up, and extinguished the flames that had fastened upon her garments.

Fortunately the throwing of some green branches had for a moment deadened the fire and afforded a comparatively safe resting-place, and she had been but slightly injured.

The red men were skillful in the treatment of wounds of that character, and even the chief assisted in dressing them, so happy was he in having possession of his destined bride again. It was some time, however, before she was sufficiently recovered to travel; then she was lifted upon a horse, and the chief triumphantly returned homeward, for once in his life using a prisoner with kindness. And the first thing he asked, upon his arrival home, was concerning Old Moscow.

"He is safe," was the answer. "All the pale-faces in the world could not give him freedom."

"It is well. To-morrow Horse Shoe will take the pale squaw to wife, and the groans of the tortured trapper will be the sweetest of the wedding music."

Guarded by a score of revengeful squaws, with her lover dead and Old Moscow but little better, what possible hope could there be for the fair prisoner?

CHAPTER IX.

THE HUMORS OF THE MEDICINE MAN.

As soon as the medicine man had passed out of the sight of the group who were gazing at the wigwam, from which he had recently issued, and was satisfied that none was watching, he hid away until the return of the chief and the girl, so that he could conveniently listen. Then he threw aside his rigidity of manner and slow steps, and passed as rapidly along as if but a score of years—not three-score-and-ten—had left their snows in his hair and wrinkles upon his forehead. Indeed, so rapid were his movements, that very few even of the younger warriors could have kept pace with him.

He went straight to the cave in the rocks, disappeared in its depths, returned with an armful of dry wood, rebuilt the altar, and kindled a fire, whose blaze could be seen for miles around. Then he descended again, guided by the light from above, and made a careful examination of the mysteries of the cavern, looking for and diving into secret hiding places, and bringing forth the proceeds of many years of theft.

His investigation was not finished before he heard the sound of footsteps, and taking up the skeleton of the famished man, he seated it in a corner, threw a robe around it so as to almost conceal the ghastly features, and hiding behind it, awaited the coming of the intruder.

But, whoever it was hesitated for some time before venturing below, and when he at length did so, it was as one who was momentarily expecting to receive some sudden shock. Brave as he was even Horse Shoe trembled as he looked around, saw the confused mass of plunder strewn over the floor, and saw the grim figure in the corner.

"What would the chief of the Dacotahs with the medicine man of the tribe?" asked the voice, the living speaking for the dead.

"The warriors of the red men said that you would speak with me," was the reply.

"And for this you dared to come where, with exceeding fasting and prayer, I wait for the teachings of the Great Spirit?"

"I sought in vain in other places."

"And like a squaw had not the power to wait. Begone! Yet stay. It is better that we should talk here than in any other place. Listen intently to what I would say. You would wed one whose skin is fair as that of the lily of the valley, and hair as soft as the silk of the maize?"

"The heart of the chief has warmed toward her. She is his captive, and by the laws of the tribe he can do with her as he wills."

"Such are the words of truth. But listen to those of the Great Manitou. Last night the medicine man of the Sioux was ferried over the dark river and traveled through the country of souls. He saw there the warriors that had long since passed from earth, and the Great Spirit whispered his will in his ears. He must not take the girl to his wigwam until the rising of another moon."

"For three days! But," asked the chief, suspiciously, "if once dead how could you return to life?"

"The Manitou has power to give as well as take away life. Let the warrior come nearer and see if he is not even now talking through the lips of the dead."

Nerving himself, the chief crept slowly forward, and with trembling fingers drew back the covering, and gazed upon the wan features of the victim of starvation. The deep, solemn voice that thrilled through every fiber of his frame, asked again:

"Is the face not that of the dead?"

"Yes—yes," and the chief hastily retreated.

"And dare you doubt the words coming from the lips of the Manitou through the grave?"

"No—go on."

"The Great Spirit wills, also, that the young squaw should be left alone in the wigwam, and treated with every kindness."

"For three days! But what of the prisoner?"

"When the pale squaw and the chieftain are married, then let the prisoner die! But not till then."

Half-doubting the truth of what he had seen, but half-believing what he had heard, and yet awed by the presence of death into submission, the chief was glad to gain the outer air.

But the work of the strange medicine man was evidently not fully accomplished. He drew the dead man from the corner, covered the skeleton form with robes as nearly as possible like those he wore, painted the face and hands black, lifted it up and carried it above, placed it with its back against the stone altar, so as to retain an upright position; threw more wood upon the fire, and again took the most direct route to the village.

The story of his death had arrived before him. Reticent, as the chief had been trained to be from childhood, he could not keep the story of what he had seen to himself; and so when told of the actions of the medicine man previous to his return, he related his visit to the cave in full.

"It must have been his ghost," he said, with increasing awe.

Yet, to put the matter beyond the possibility of question, he sent back runners to the cave, and when they returned and reported that the medicine man was seated upon the top of the rock, he was certain he had been conversing with a spirit, and more especially as the painted, curiously decorated form could, at the moment, be seen stalking slowly by.

If the dead could thus walk, what direful thing might not happen to any of their number, and as it approached they fled shrieking. According to their superstitious belief to have crossed its path—the path of a ghost—would have been followed by the most terrible calamities, and whichever way it turned, men and women disappeared, and it could have depopulated the village had it been so disposed.

By midnight not a soul could be found stirring. Fearful retribution had been threatened upon any that should do so. The medicine man had notified the warriors by signs that he would be responsible for the safety of the prisoners, and those who were bold enough to peep out, saw him standing just within the shadow of the woods.

Much of this fear was owing to the darkness and the story of the chief, for, when morning came again, they found strength and courage in numbers, and rushed to the wigwam where Old Moscow had been confined, even though the medicine man remained where they had last seen him. It was empty.

They turned to that of the girl, and she also was gone.

With howls of rage and disappointed vengeance they rushed toward the medicine man, to find his robes cunningly placed upon a bush that had been trimmed for that purpose, but no man, while other dresses were scattered around. With a glimmering sense of how their credulity and superstition had been practiced upon, they dashed toward the cave and began clambering up the rocks.

Very few remained to tell of what they had seen, for as the foremost reached the top, there was a mighty explosion, and the forms of the living were whirled aloft with the bones of the dead, and a fearful hollow in the rocks was all that remained to tell of the once secret cave of the medicine man.

CHAPTER X.

WANDERING IN DARKNESS.

Three fugitives from the power of the red men were toiling along by the side of a little stream that wound through a deep valley, and interchanging thoughts and relating all that had transpired since they had last been together.

All had told their story. Those of the two men were short, but that of their companion, a young girl, was more lengthy, and was listened to with breathless attention.

"I tell yer," said Old Moscow, as he tenderly picked out the smoothest path for the feet of Maggie Grey to travel, "you may speak yer mind freely here, for ther rustlin' of ther trees will keep yer from bein' heard even if thar war plenty of outlyin' scouts ter-night, which thar won't be."

"No," replied Philip Lee; "you have taken good care that they should all remain in their wigwams."

"Ther cowardly fools," continued Old Moscow, with one of his customary laughs; "ter think now easy I managed 'em. Ther hardest part with me was handlin' ther corpse. I knew it war nothin' but clay, but arter all I had rather not done it, 'specially in ther night-time, and shouldn't have done it nuther ef it hadn't er bin fer you two young folks."

"How very much we have to thank you for," replied the girl, as she warmly pressed the hand she was holding. "When can we ever repay you?"

"Wal, you may some day. But ef yer don't it hain't no great matter."

"I am sure I shall never forget your kindness. But do, my good friend, tell me the whole story."

"Ter begin back ter thar beginnin', I whar er lyin', tied hand and foot, in their wigwam, when who should enter but their medicine man, and I thought my last hour had come, sure enough. But very soon I found it whar ther best friend I had

in their hull world, and he told me all erbout their cave, and said as how he had come back ter see ef yer whar safe. I told him how yer hadn't been brought back as yet, but I didn't think yer could posserbly escape, and he said as how yer must be saved or we must both die for it. Wal, we kinder put our heads tergether, and concluded ter bergin by makin' their red skins erfear, ef we could, and so their boy jist burned er lot of brimstone he had found in their cave, and I groaned and screamed as if I war er bein' run through with er hundred red hot irons. Then I wanted him ter go and take keer of hisself, but he said he wouldn't stir er step—that I knew more'n he did erbout playin' medicine man, which am er fact—and so he made me take his trappin's and staid in my place. I hurried back ter their cave, which their boy had told me all erbout, ter see what I could find, and plan er way for their safety of all hands. But when I saw their dead man, it war all easy, and come ter me in a minit. I knew that ef I could only impose on their chief, the rest wouldn't be hard. But I saw it wouldn't do ter fool too long, and so sent him off, and carried their body up ter their top of their rock, and dressed it, and built er fire, and got as many of their old dead medicine man's traps as I could well carry, and started fer their wigwam whar the boy whar. I wasn't very long settin' him free, and I hadn't more'n got to their other side of the village before I saw that he had slipped out, and whar playin' his part like er man. And that completely upsot their Injuns. Two medicine men at their same time war too much fer them ter stand. But arter I had got fixed up and they saw three, I didn't know but they would have run erway entirely."

"Are we in no danger of being followed?" asked the girl, with her anxiety returning.

"Sartingly."

"And their vengeance would be terrible?"

"Thar's no doubt of that, though I don't think they would harm you."

From that time every precaution was taken that experience could dictate, to render their trail a blind one, and they hurried along with all possible speed until the sun had been up for hours, and they had passed out of the valley and reached a high rocky point from whence they could see upon every side to a considerable distance.

The old trapper selected a spot that he deemed to be the most safe—one out from the timber, but protected by rocks and covered with tall, reedy grass that entirely hid them. He had taken great care that there should be no sign of their having come in that direction, and gave it as his opinion that they might rest in almost safety, for any length of time.

Old Moscow soon withdrew to a little distance, flung himself at full length upon the hard ground, and very soon his heavy breathing told that he had wandered into the mysterious land of dreams.

As long as Philip Lee and Maggie Grey fancied that their old and true friend remained awake, they sat at a respectful distance, and talked only in the most commonplace manner of the events of the previous night—he filling in the tale of which Old Moscow had only sketched the outline. But that soon grew too cold for hearts like theirs, and Lee drew nearer to her side and in low whispered words of passion told of the desires of his soul—told the old, sweet story that has been repeated so many thousands of times.

"Maggie," he said, in a straightforward, manly way, and she made no resistance against the strong arm that crept around her waist. "Maggie, from their fust moment I saw yer I loved yer."

"And I you, Philip," she replied, as honestly, though blushing at her boldness.

"And yet it might have taken er long time fer me ter have told it ef you had remained safe. But somehow them scenes through which we have passed have made me bold."

"And what girl would not love a man who had passed through so much for her sake?" she asked, earnestly.

"It am no more than Old Moscow or I would have done fer any one in yer siteration, and I didn't think of myself, but only of yer sweet face."

"And I of you, Philip dear. When the wolves were the thickest and fiercest around me, and I expected every moment would be my last, I couldn't help thinking of and praying for you, and if I had died I believe your name would have been the last thing upon my lips."

"It war terrible fer one so young, and er gal, too, and I don't well see how yer could love er feller like me who hain't got no celeration and——"

"Learnin' don't make the man," she answered, proudly, "and I wouldn't have you changed for all the world."

The honest confession was repaid in true lovers' fashion, and for a long time their conversation ran in the same channel—unbroken only as the young trapper cautiously raised his head above the tall grass, and sent his eagle eye over every part of

the surrounding country. But as their reserve was broken down, they talked more freely and told all of their hopes and fears, something of caution was forgotten, and for many minutes an enemy might have remained in plain sight undiscovered.

But after a time of longer and sweeter endearments than usual he fancied he saw something that might betoken danger. What it was he could not then determine. Far away upon the prairie were black spots that he had not noticed before. They might be birds, or beasts, or simply stones, but, until something more tangible was to be seen, he would not disturb either the girl or his male companion.

Yet he could not blind the eyes of a newly awakened love. Even as he resumed his seat Maggie saw at a glance that something was wrong, and exclaimed in alarm:

"Philip, what have you seen? Are the Indians coming?"

"No, Maggie; at least I don't think they are," he replied, soothingly.

"But you have seen something? Your face tells me that!"

"I don't know as I have discovered anything that wasn't thar before."

"Had we not better call Old Moscow?"

"Not yet."

"At least let me look."

He took hold of her hand and guided her to where she could obtain a clear view and they sat silently watching for some time. Then the same opinion found expression at the same instant from their lips:

"Horses!"

Soon the horses drew so near that Philip could decide that the riders were Indians, and a moment after they separated and some rode swiftly around to the other side of the hill.

"Do not stir fer yer life," he whispered to the girl, "or make the slightest noise. I will creep around and watch them. Ef thar is any danger of thar coming here I will let yer know and you, then, can wake up Old Moscow. But I think thar hain't."

With scarcely the moving of a reed he crept away, and she bowed her head and lay as low to the ground as possible—almost held her breath. But she had not been long in that position before a sharp, hissing sound attracted her attention, and turning quickly, she saw a large rattlesnake.

The serpent had drawn its loathsome length from one of the many holes around, and had approached very near, apparently without being aware of her presence. But the instant it became so it threw itself into a massive coil, with upraised head, fire-flashing eyes, spitefully darting tongue, and rapidly vibrating tail. What should she do?

A number of the Indians had drawn up their horses and were eagerly looking up at the high land upon which she lay concealed. Old Moscow was sleeping at a distance, and her lover had gone she knew not whither. If she raised up or called for help it would give the Indians notice of her presence, and if she remained it would be to meet death in the most horrid form. Even when she had faced the pack of howling wolves in the darkness her nerves had not been so terribly tried. But there was no time for thought, and, brave as she had shown herself, she felt the cold sweat standing upon her forehead and oozing out through every pore of her skin.

The aspect of the snake was constantly becoming more threatening. Its lidless eyes flashed and burned like living coals—its neck became more rigid—the scales shone more and more like burnished gold and jet—its head was thrust forward—its mouth more open, and its rattles rang more swiftly and sharply!

The poor girl dared not raise up or attempt to flee—dared not crawl away—dared not even turn over. The Indians that were watching from below would at once detect the sudden disturbance of the grass, and rush to learn the cause. She drew back as far as possible, and called, in the lowest voice, to Old Moscow—to her lover—but there was no answer save the angry hiss of the serpent as it uncoiled with lightning rapidity, drew nearer, and again prepared itself for battle, with every fold in its body convulsed with fury. She could have put out her hand and touched it—was almost paralyzed with fear—fascinated by the changing light that flashed from scales and eyes.

What should she do? The answer was forced upon her. With the swiftness of thought the head of the monster was flung forward—it fastened itself upon her arm. Human nature burst through all restraints, and Maggie Grey's screams could have been heard for miles!

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE WAR-PATH.

There are no words powerful enough to paint the rage and disappointment of the chief of the Sioux when the discovery was made as to how he had been tricked and robbed of his prisoners.

Selecting a number from the most active of the warriors, Horse Shoe divided them into two parties—one on foot to go through the valley, and the other, headed by himself, to take their horses and ride swiftly through the wood and prairie until they should meet at the extreme end of the lowland.

The mounted men were the first to arrive at the place of rendezvous. They rode slowly forward, not in the least suspecting that those they eagerly sought were very near. The point before them was the very last place they would have dreamed the fugitives would select for camping. It was too much exposed for concealment. But in order to gain the most speedy intelligence of their comrades, who were exploring the valley, a portion passed to the opposite side.

Waiting for a time, those that remained were about to ride away and in an instant more would have disappeared had not the terrible screams of the frantic girl rang upon their ears. Then all was the wildest commotion.

"It is the voice of the pale squaw," said the chief, and at a motion of his hand every horse was ridden into cover and every rider dismounted.

Again and again the wild screams rang over the prairie and the quick ears of the warriors could distinguish that they were caused by terror. Could the fair fugitive be alone and surrounded by some unknown danger? They listened, as such men only can listen, as the cry for help burst forth yet again, and then all was still as the grave. Puzzled to know what such a thing could mean they remained yet motionless for a time—then they began to crawl together and consult. Treacherous themselves, they were constantly on the lookout for it in others, and it might well be that the late captives had met a party of their friends and that the girl had been used as a decoy.

But the impetuous disposition of Horse Shoe—his passionate longing to have the girl again in his power—would not admit of long delay, and whispering to his followers, they began to creep like so many serpents in all directions, calculating to surround any that might be concealed above and make them an easy prey.

"Shoot down the pale-faces—chop them into a thousand pieces, but spare the young squaw," was the command of the chief, and never were men more prepared for acts of the most diabolical cruelty.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW PERILS.

The screams of the girl instantly awoke Old Moscow, and rushing to her side, he demanded, in angry tones, and with fire flashing eyes:

"What in ther name of thunder am yer?"

He saw the huge snake fastened to and dangling from the arm she had upraised, and with one blow struck it to the earth, and trampled its life out under his feet; then he tore off the covering and began examining for a wound; but even his experienced eyes could find none, and his words somewhat reassured the trembling girl.

"Yer far more skeart than hurt," he said; "but even of ther venomous thing had bitten yer thar wouldn't be no cause fer fear. I always carry er leetle snake fern erround with me. But yer haint bin bitten, not even scratched; leastwise I kin find no spot that looks like it."

"Are you quite sure?" she asked, clinging to him for support.

"Jest as sure as that I am livin'. Yer sleeve war loose," and when ther reptyle—ugh! I don't like them any more than you do—struck, its teeth got tangled in ther caliker, and didn't reach any farther. But whar am ther boy?"

"I don't know. He stole away us soon as the Indians—"

"Injuns! Now may Heaven be good ter us! Come this way, quick, and tell me erbout it."

He drew her to a more secluded spot, and heard her tell the story in a few, excited words, then he became terribly in earnest.

"We am hemmed in, and will be shot down like wolves in er trap, and all on account of a woman's screams. But thar's no use of complainin' now. We've got inter er bad scrape, and must git out on it, ef we kin. Yer don't know whar the boy am? Wal, he'll have ter take keer of hisself. Come with me, and be

jest as silent as death. We'll try and fool the redskins yet. But ef we don't—"

The low but quickly repeated call of a crow caught his ear, and he stood as rigid as marble, and listened until it was repeated three times and at regular intervals.

"Yes," he continued, "I hear yer, boy, and I see them, too—leastwise, I know they am erbout. Come this way, gal!"

For once fortune appeared to be on their side. Without having seen any enemies or having been discovered themselves, they crawled swiftly along until fully a mile from their late camping-ground; then as they rested for a moment, a wild and terrible yell burst upon their ears, and the girl looked to her companion for an explanation.

"Ther injuns have discovered ther boy," he explained, sorrowfully.

"Then I will go back and die with him," she said rising up, with the light of determination flashing from her eyes, even through the fast-falling tears.

"Am yer mad?" he asked, pulling her quickly down. "What good could yer do? It would be only gettin' yerself inter er scrape, without helping him in the least. No, no, it hain't to be thought on. Ef yer must know what has become of him—and I don't believe yer kin love him any more than I do—I'll go back and try and find him out jest as soon as I get yer ter a place of safety."

They journeyed on for a little distance, then a little waterfall caught the eyes of Old Moscow and he paused and began to examine it closely.

"Thar's often a cave behind one of them things," he said, though rather talking to himself than the girl, "and if it am ther case here, no better place could be found in ther hull valley. You jest crouch down in the bushes and I'll go and see. Ef so be as I expect, Heaven is surely on our side."

It was as he had surmised. Behind the sheet of water was an opening in the rocks of considerable extent—large enough to contain a dozen men, and once within they would not only be effectually screened, but could converse without danger of being heard. Still it was no easy task to reach it. The opening was several feet above the ground and the rocks slippery and dangerous. If alone Old Moscow would have smiled at the task, but the girl was a dead weight upon his every movement. He was forced to carry her through the falling stream, and it required all his strength to raise her to a sufficient height. More than once his footing gave way and both came near falling. But at last the feat was accomplished, and panting from excessive exertion, Old Moscow stretched himself upon the brink, caught the sparkling shower in his hands and drank long and eagerly. The poor drenched and half-drowned girl shrank back to the farthest limit and endeavored to wring out her saturated garments and restore some little of warmth to her numbed limbs.

"Ef one had only plenty ter eat," said Old Moscow, "he could stay in this place forever and not be found out, for all ther Injuns in their world might search fer er cen'try and not find it."

"If Philip was only here—if I only knew he was safe," sighed the girl.

"Ther heart of ther doe will foller arter ther buck," muttered Old Moscow. "Ef I go arter him I will have ter leave yer alone. But remember that you mustn't stir until I come back, even though it shouldn't be till to-morrer. I'll do ther best I kin ter find ther boy and save him, but ef them redskins have got him inter thar clutches agin I'll have ter come back and take yer hum berfore I kin go any farther. Take good care of yerself, and mind that yer don't make any noise whatever yer may see or hear, and erbove all things don't try ter git erway. I'll be back jest as soon as I kin. But ef I shouldn't by ther time ther sun rises and sinks ergin yer kin make up yer mind that I've been called hum ter what we are told is er better land. Then yer must try and find yer way ter ther nearest settlement and jest say er prayer fer poor Old Moscow. Good-by."

He crept to the edge of the rocks, gently lowered himself and disappeared, and the girl, when left to herself, began to comprehend the dangers with which she was surrounded, and almost to regret that she had permitted him to leave upon so desperate an undertaking.

Old Moscow looked backward to see that no spy had marked his movements, then crept swiftly forward, though often pausing and laying his ear to the ground to listen. It was a work, however, of some time for him to reach a point from which he could obtain an uninterrupted view of the spot of their late encampment, and when he did his blood fairly boiled in his veins.

"Ther red devils," he muttered from between his tightly clenched teeth, "have bin erfeard ter attack us like men and have ertempted ter drive us out by fire. And ther poor boy must have bin burned ter death er fallen inter thar hands, and that'll result in ther same thing."

From where he was lying he could see the flames and smoke rolling upward in great waves—a fire so hot that nothing of life could remain in it for a moment. But to satisfy himself more perfectly he sought for a tall tree and ascended to the top. Then he could look down almost directly into the flames—could see them surging and leaping from point to point—could look as it were into the crater of a burning volcano, and knew how futile it would be for any man to attempt to hide away from its power.

Ascending still higher he looked over the prairie and saw a band of Indians riding away, and was certain that a prisoner was bound to and lying upon the back of one of the horses.

"Poor boy," he said, as he descended, "yer chances am bad ernuff that am er fact, and ef it wasn't fer ther gal—helpless thing that she am—I'd soon be upon yer trail and see ef something couldn't be done ter save yer—even ter givin my life fer yer sake."

Filled with sorrowful thoughts he hastened back to the cave, crept within, and stood for a moment like one suddenly stricken with palsy. The cave was empty! The girl that he had left there but a short time previously had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAITOR.

When Old Moscow had left the girl alone she began to look about for the best place to rest, and having found it sat down and began thinking of her situation. It certainly was a desolate one, and the more she reflected the more she became dissatisfied, and as the hours crept on and Old Moscow did not return, she concluded he must have either been taken prisoner or killed. In that view of the case, and there was no other reasonable one, she would be obliged to depend entirely upon herself and the sooner she began to do so the better.

Crawling to the vail of water she listened long, but could hear nothing except the plash that had continued unbroken for centuries. Then she determined to venture out, and clinging to the rocks attempted to lower herself as Old Moscow had done, until she could find a footing below. But her strength was too feeble, and her experience too little, and caught in the water, her hold was broken, and she fell to the bottom and was hurried into the bed of the stream.

Half dead from fright, bruised, and nearly strangled, she might never have been able to recover firm ground had not a friendly hand been stretched out—raised her, and carried her to a point of safety.

"Thank Heaven! Old Moscow!"

She gasped out the words, and rubbing the dirt and water from her eyes turned toward him, but shrank back in horror as she saw that it was an Indian!

"The pale-face will get up," he said, in the most guttural voice. "She will walk," and he pointed in the direction of the wigwams; "and if her lips open to utter a sound, this"—and he fiercely flourished his tomahawk over her head.

There was nothing to do but obey, and she hurried along as fast as she was able—he dragging her by the hair and pricking her with the point of his knife, when she failed to move as swiftly as he wished. But it was well for her that the distance was short or she would have fallen by the way. Her limbs were just beginning to fail her when they came upon a number of mounted men and he gave her into their charge.

"Take her to the village of our people," he said, "and bind her until the strings of deer-skin cut into the bone, if there is any danger of escape. But first let her tell of Old Moscow. Where is he?"

"I do not know," she answered, and truly.

"The squaw lies, and his tomahawk was whirled so near her head as to cut away one of the bright curls.

"For the love of Heaven, spare me! I speak the truth," she exclaimed.

"Yes, I will spare you," he answered, with the most fiendish of smiles. "It would be too much of mercy to kill you now. Take her (to his companions), but some of you come with me. We will track Old Moscow to the place where he had hidden the girl, and when he comes back he will find not her but us."

Thankful for even a brief respite Maggie took her place upon a horse and rode forward until they came again to the village. But long before they entered it the sound of mourning could be heard from every side, and on every hand were marks of death. She shuddered as she thought how terrible had been the destruction when the powder concealed in the cave of the medicine man had exploded. But she had far more reason to think of herself and her lover, for she had scarcely arrived before she saw him brought in securely fettered upon the back of a horse, with blood slowly dripping from many a wound. Then her misery became too terrible for human endurance, and with a heart-rending cry of anguish she fell senseless to the ground.

"Carry her to the wigwam of Monee," commanded Horse Shoe, with a smile lighting up even his blackened face as he saw that his destined bride was again safe.

It was some time before Monee, the once wife of the old medicine man, and believed to be as much of a witch and physician as himself, could be found. She was one of the kind that revel in laying out the dead and had her hands more than full. And it was with a very bad grace that she came at all—and would not have done so had she dared to disobey the publicly expressed commands of the chief. With grumbling and discontent she took the place, but something of professional pride returned and she hastened to procure the simple remedies of the woods, administer them, and chafe the icy hands until life was restored.

Then she sat and grumbled of death and torture, until joined by another aged squaw who had come unasked to share her vigil. At first, Monee glanced at her savagely through the darkness, but the visitor drew cautiously aside her blanket with the simple expression of "Pale-man's fire-water."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the cave of the medicine man."

"Give."

The spirits were passed along, and then there was no need of urging her to drink. Very soon Monee, who had swallowed a sufficient quantity to render her helpless—reeled into a corner and fell into a heavy slumber. As if in pity for her situation, her companion drew her blanket over her, and, without paying the slightest attention to the white girl, left the wigwam and took her way to that in which the young trapper was confined; and, whispering to the guards, gave them drink also. And they soon began to feel its narcotic effects, for more fearfully than they had ever done before. Despite all they could do their eyelids became like lead—they yawned, stretched themselves, did everything that was in their power to fight against sleep, but at last gave way and rolled helplessly upon the ground.

The old squaw stooped down and examined them closely, and, had there been light enough a smile or intense satisfaction might have been seen lighting up her features. But, as soon as she became satisfied that they had given up all thoughts of vigilance, she lightly drew aside the skin curtain of the wigwam and entered. The prisoner asked, "Why do yer come ter torment me!"

"There was once a pale-face that was very kind to my son—took care of him when sick and wounded—gave him food, and when well enough to travel, a horse, that he might go back to his own people. Many years after he died, but, before going through that dark valley, he made me swear by the great Manitou that I would do as much for one of your people, if the time ever came when I could do so."

"That am strange," muttered Lee, in his own tongue, and then instantly returning to that of the Sioux, continued:

"Thar is er gal who am er prisoner. Go and be kind ter her; free her and guide her safe ter some settlement, and I will forever bless yer."

"It shall be done. But do you wish to live?"

"Sartinly. Yet, ef only one on us kin be saved, let it be ther gal, and I'll die happy."

"Drink," and the squaw held the bottle to his lips. "Drink. It is the accursed fire-water of the pale-faces, but now it will do you good. There. Let me loosen your hands."

Soon after, muffling herself in her blanket, the aged crone departed and crept softly back to where the girl was confined, and, seating herself, began telling in a low voice that she had been to see the young trapper, and the heart of Maggie bounded with joy when she heard the news that he had received no dangerous wounds, and that his constant thought was for her.

"And can you not—will you not save us?" she asked. "We have never done you any harm."

"Think of the cave of the medicine man!" replied the red hag, with her frame quivering with excitement. "But do not speak so loud. Even the trees have ears, and the wind whispers secrets. If the Manitou wills I can save you both."

"May Heaven be thanked."

"Hist! She whom the chief has sent to guard you, and the braves around the wigwam of him of the traps and snares, will know nothing more for hours. The sun will rise and they see it not. The root that I mixed with the strong fire-water will make them slumber like the dead. If I could but get the chief to drink a cupful I would give many beaver skins, and the hides of many buffaloes. Then I would laugh at the fear of detection. Now we must have the cunning of the weasel, and work underground like the mole. Let the pale squaw pretend to sleep until I come again. I go to see that all is safe—to whisper a few words in the ears of the pale brave. Then I will guide your moccasins where your eyes need never be dimmed by tears for fear of the red man."

With the same precautions that she had before adopted, the

old squaw passed out, and slowly made the rounds of the village, looking at this corpse and that, but apparently too deeply bowed in grief to engage in conversation. An hour afterward she took her place by the side of Philip Lee, cut his bonds, and after whispering a few words in his ears, departed, and soon again stood by the girl.

"Get up," she said, "and wrap this blanket around you," taking the one from the shoulders of the sleeping Monee. "Hide your face and hair so that they cannot be seen, and walk as if the weight of a hundred years were bowing your head."

They passed out of the wigwam, stole between the others like shadows, and reached the woods without detection. Two horses were standing near, and the first thing the girl saw was her manly lover.

"Oh, Philip! dear Philip!" she murmured, forgetting all else in the bliss of the moment. "May Heaven be praised! I hold you once again in my arms."

"And I you, my darling," he replied, as he strained her to his heart, and warmly returned her caresses.

"When you are beyond the bounds of the red man," broke in the old squaw, sternly, "then will be time enough for the folly of love-making."

"But we are safe?" replied the girl, still clinging to her lover.

"Safe for torture!" thundered the voice of Horse Shoe, as he and two braves stepped from behind the tree. "You safe for torture, and you traitor for death!"

And with a single blow of his tomahawk he laid the old squaw quivering at his feet.

Once again the lovers were prisoners—without a friend—and the day would soon dawn that would bring the most fearful torture to one at least.

CHAPTER XIV.

TORTURE.

The morning sun, as it streamed down upon the encampment of the Indians, revealed the two wretched prisoners bound, back-to-back, to a post that had been placed in the center of the wigwams.

Almost with the sun the fiends of the forest and prairie began to gather around.

At a sign from the chief the bonds of the girl were loosened and she was motioned away. But if her life had depended upon it she could not have stirred. The long-restricted circulation of the blood had left her limbs numb and useless, and at the first step she fell to the ground. But soon the life-current ran free again, and half-rising, she grasped the garments of the trapper, climbed upward, twined her arms around his neck, and their lips met in the last earthly kiss—for brutal hands immediately tore her away, and carrying her to a little distance, forced her to become a spectator of her lover's sufferings.

"Let the prisoner be prepared for torture," thundered the chief, taking his place beside the girl and compelling her to submit to caresses from which she shrank as from corruption.

"Coward!" hissed the trapper. "Coward! ter insult er woman. I wish ther lightnin' would strike yer dead."

"Silence, pale-faced dog! Silence, or I will have your tongue torn out by the roots and roasted before your very eyes."

"Coward!" still muttered Lee. "Oh, Heaven! how I wish my hands were only at liberty. But yer dare not do what yer say."

It was a bold and foolish challenge, and Horse Shoe would have instantly carried out his threat had not the other chiefs prevented. Such a thing must not be, else the cries of the prisoner for mercy would not make music for their ears.

Sullenly the chief repeated his orders for the preparations for torture; and the young trapper was stripped to the waist and showed a form that was the envy of all.

His hands were released, so that he could move his arms from the elbows, and his head was left free. This was the very subtlety of cruelty and the greatest test of nerves, for very few men could resist the impulse to move when they saw knife or hatchet coming directly toward the brain—few who would not raise their hands to protect their hearts. This the crafty Indians knew, and were ready to shout taunts at the first exhibition of cowardice. But the prisoner stood firm as iron. Not a muscle of his face moved.

The usual routine of boys with headless arrows and the younger braves with dulled knives was gone through with, and though the trapper did not escape without wounds, they were slight ones. Then those who had won a name upon the war-path displayed their skill. Their weapons were indeed deadly ones; every knife and hatchet was sharpened to the utmost, and a fair blow from either would result in instant death. But such was not their purpose, as Philip Lee well knew. It was simply a trial of skill upon their part and fortitude upon his—to see how near they could hurl their weapons without inflicting a wound, and how well he could stand the test.

This over, at a signal from the chief a bundle of sharpened pine splinters were brought, and Horse Shoe stepped forward and drove one into the flesh—would have driven it into the eye had he not desired that the trapper should see as well as feel the end of his malignant vengeance. In this he was followed by every warrior, though care was taken that the points should simply pierce and hang from the skin. It was torture, not death, they were inflicting; and though the prisoner—all but his face—looked like a human porcupine, yet there was nothing dangerous in his situation.

"Now," said the chief, "let the pale dog howl out his death-song."

A shout of defiance was the answer.

There was no notice taken of this, further than to hasten the final preparations. Dry and resinous wood was brought and piled around him, but at such a distance as to slowly roast him to death. It was true, the splinters would take fire, and burn, but they would only blister, and there was little probability of the smoke producing strangulation.

The prisoner was fully prepared to meet his doom like a man, but instantly after he saw and heard that which caused him to shiver like a leaf in the autumn wind—to almost make a coward of him.

"The pale squaw will light the pile," said Horse Shoe, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the girl. "When she has burned up her pale dog of a lover, she will become the wife of the red warrior."

"Never! Oh, Heaven have mercy," she screamed, struggling to get free.

But she might as well have endeavored to get away from the hand of fate as the iron grasp of the chief. He swung her to her feet as easily as if she had been a child, and dragged her forward. And never did woman battle more fiercely, though without avail. More dead than alive, she was forced to the pile of wood—the funeral fire from whose flames and smoke her lover's soul would be burned from its covering of flesh. A torch was placed in her hands, and she was bidden to use it. What she would not do of her own volition she was made to do by force. With one arm around her, Horse Shoe held her hands with the other, moved forward the fatal torch, and in an instant the dry wood began to blaze.

"Farewell, Maggie. Heaven save you and pity me," she heard issuing from the midst of the rapidly increasing flames and smoke.

"Oh, Heaven!" was her answer.

"Now the pale squaw will become the wife of the red man," whispered Horse Shoe in triumph, and stooped down to pollute her pure lips with his kisses.

That was too much. Had he waited but an instant longer she would have fallen into his arms insensible. Now all of the tigress in her nature was instantly aroused. The torch still remained in her hand—she swung it full into the face of Horse Shoe, and with a shout of mad joy, sprang over the wood and clung, amid the flame and smoke, with her arms around the neck of her lover.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE FOR THE PRIZE.

The flames darted with tremendous force and fury around the devoted lovers, and they would very soon have been consumed, had not the Indians interfered, and kicking aside the blazing fagots, tore the girl away, who was instantly seized by Horse Shoe, and dragged toward his wigwam, on the other side of the village.

Then the still smoking wood was piled around the trapper again, and fresh fuel added, but before even one of his manly limbs was severely scorched, or a curl upon his head injured, a volley of bullets was poured from the woods, and a band of hardy trappers, headed by Old Moscow, appeared upon the scene. The Indians fled in all directions; but the brave old trapper gave no heed to the fugitives. As he had been the first to rush from cover, so he was the first to reach the blazing pile, and, regardless of all personal danger, he cut the prisoner loose, flung him upon his shoulders, and carried him to a place of safety.

Like searching hounds, the trappers disappeared in every direction, save those who remained with Lee, and endeavored to keep him quiet. Every nook and corner was explored, but nothing could be found. The chief appeared to have spirited both himself and the girl away, without leaving a trace. And Old Moscow fretted and fumed and growled accordingly; came as near swearing as he ever did; and it was not until a little boy gave the information that he had seen the chief riding away with the girl that he acted at all reasonably.

His keen and experienced eye ran over the horses that were tied near, and flinging himself upon the back of one that promised the most speed, he dashed madly away, with his blood up,

and feeling every inch a man, for he was not only well mounted, but armed.

At the first, some of his companions had kept within sight; but, one after another, they had dropped out of the race, or turned aside to find some other trail, and he was entirely alone in a prairie of considerable extent, that was broken by a small grove but a little distance ahead, and nearly in the center of the treeless plain. That such a point of observation should escape the eye of one like Old Moscow was impossible. Could he have arranged matters to his own satisfaction, he could scarcely have been better pleased. Once there, both himself and horse would be securely hidden. He would most likely find water, as well as feed, and he could see for miles around.

Without the slightest idea of danger, he pressed forward, until within a short distance, and then was recalled to a sense of his situation by the whizzing of an arrow past his ear; and instantly turning his horse, he rode to a safer distance, and prepared his rifle for service.

Then he raised his voice to its greatest power, and shouted:

"Come out and fight like er man, ef yer dare, and not be hidin' like er cowardly wolf!"

The only reply was another arrow, that struck but did not pierce the flesh of the horse, and as it dropped harmless to the ground, the trapper resumed, with a smile:

"Ef yer hain't got any better weapon nor that ar bow, I hain't in any danger. But ef yer'd only show yer ugly body ever so little, I'd soon teach yer what kind of er one I had, and how well I could use it."

For a long time the battle continued a distant one—the Indian shooting his barbed arrows, and the white man not daring to return the fire, for fear of injuring the girl. But it could not last. There never was a quiver that would not give out, be it filled ever so full; and when Old Moscow had determined that such was the case, he was about to dismount and creep near, using the horse as a shield. Then the Indian spoke for the first time, challenging him to a fair fight.

"Let the pale-face lay aside his fire weapon," he said, "and To-ho-pe-ka will meet him, on horseback, armed only with knife and tomakawk."

"Yes, arter yer've tried ter take my life er dozen times with yer bow and arrers. Ef yer hadn't bin er coward yer'd have done it in ther fust place, when I wanted yer tu. But even ef I should agree ter it now how kin I know that you'll keep yer word."

The Indian threw his still strained bow out on the prairie, and in doing so exposed himself sufficiently for a fair mark, and the rifle of the trapper was instantly raised at his shoulder, his keen eye glancing along the barrel and his finger upon the trigger. A single, slight straining of the muscles and a severe wound, if not death, would have followed. But even as he was in the act of firing he dropped his weapon to the ground and continued:

"How kin I tell thars anything worth fightin' fer except it mought be yer miserable life? Whar am the gal?"

"Here."

"Yer say so."

"If ther red man will let her go forth will the pale-face promise that he will not carry her off until he has fairly won her?"

"Wal, yes. Ef yer let her come out safe and sound, I'll agree."

There was a rustling in the bushes for a few moments, and then Maggie came rushing toward Old Moscow and with her first breath begged him to lift her upon his horse and fly.

"No," he replied firmly, "I can't do it."

"Why not? You have a rifle and the chief none."

"Yer don't rightly understand," he said. "It wouldn't be er hard matter fer me ter run away with yer—could do it just as well as not, but it would be tellin er lie and I can't think of sich er thing. I'm goin' ter fight ther red skin and may be killed and it wouldn't do fer me ter go inter the other world with an untruth burning on my lips."

"Is the pale-face ready?" asked the Indian.

"Yes, in er minit."

Old Moscow looked well to his weapons—grasped his hatchet firmly—placed his knife between his teeth—hugged his horse well with his knees, and after a word of caution and parting to Maggie, hoarsely shouted:

"Come on, redskin, and do yer worst, and Heaven be on ther side of right and justice."

The Indian forced his horse from the woods upon a run, but did not, as Old Moscow had expected, immediately ride to attack him. He circled round and round, evidently watching for an opportunity to throw his tomahawk to advantage, and very much depended upon the first blow. Had it not been dangerous, it would have been a beautiful sight to see how the champions of the two races maintained their reputation. But, suddenly,

and when Old Moscow least expected it, the tomahawk whizzed through the air, and nothing but a swift drawing back and throwing his horse upon his haunches saved him. And, as it was, the heavy weapon grazed his head as it passed.

Then a smile of triumph lit up the face of Old Moscow. He urged his horse forward, and, to his astonishment, the Indian did not move. He sat like a statue waiting the blow, and Old Moscow was sure of an easy victory. But just as he, also, was about to hurl his hatchet, Horse Shoe changed his position with the rapidity of lightning, drew forth a concealed bow, fitted an arrow, and fired. The shaft was truly aimed, and its showy head was buried in the breast of the white man!

"Traacherous!" he groaned out from his set teeth, as he endeavored to draw it out, but, failing to do so, broke off the wood and sent his hatchet whirling in revenge.

Pain and passion, however, had unsettled his aim, and it failed to touch the mark, and in the next breath their horses were close together, and their knives busy in the work of death. Wound upon wound followed, and their commingled blood spurted over the prairie. Yet the heavy buckskin shirt of Old Moscow offered some little protection, and by a desperate effort, he succeeded in crippling the right arm of the Indian so as to render it almost useless, and caused him to relax his hold upon his knife. Then he struck a full blow at his throat, but missed his aim. The wily Indian slipped under his horse and ran with startling rapidity toward where the girl was standing, a terrified witness as well as the prize of that strange duel.

"Shoot him! Shoot him like er dog!" shouted Old Moscow, as he endeavored to guide his horse, now frantic from the smell of blood.

His warning was too late! With a single cowardly blow the girl was stricken to the earth, the weapon wrenched from her grasp, raised, and fired.

Old Moscow reeled and came very near falling; but he instantly braced himself, sprang to the ground, avoided the blow of the clubbed rifle, and grappled his treacherous enemy with one hand, and at the same time drove his knife hilt deep into his heart with the other.

With a hollow groan the great chief of the Dacotahs fell backward and Old Moscow upon him. Then the frantic girl rushed to their side, but sank back aghast as she saw the terrible reality, and murmured:

"Dead! Oh, Heaven! Both dead!"

Stretched out stark and stiff, with his rigid face turned upward and the unclosed eyes fixed and staring, lay the once haughty chief of the tribe of the Seven Fires. He had sung his last song, shouted his last war-cry, performed his last act of treachery, and fought his last battle.

Above and upon him, with his face turned toward the earth, lay Old Moscow. He had not stirred from the position in which he had fallen. The knife was still grasped in his iron-muscle fingers, as if he was prepared to fight for the prize, even in death.

By the side of the strangely piled corpses sat the poor girl, who had been called upon to pass through so much. She, too, remained as she had fallen—staring with strained eyes and dumb lips at the fatal evidences of man's work. She sat more like a figure of stone than a living being, until a far away sound caught her ear. What it was she could not determine. It might be the rushing of wolves, might be Indians. But she had no power left to move. And yet, as the swiftly ridden horses came near—so near as to almost trample upon her and the dead—the long-fettered soul burst from its bondage in one wild and terrible scream.

"Great Heaven! Is it you? Have I indeed found you? Oh, Maggie—Maggie!" exclaimed one of the riders, as he sprang to the ground.

"Philip! Dear Philip!" and she raised herself and tottered and fell into his arms.

Then a hasty examination was made, and the body of Old Moscow was carried into the little grove. The Indian they would not defile their hands with. Greatly to their joy, Old Moscow still lived, though he was upon the very brink of eternity, and with the arrow head cut from his breast, and the bullet from his side, and with his many wounds washed and dressed, he was restored to something like consciousness, and his first thought was of those he loved.

A few months later, when Philip Lee and his beautiful Maggie were made man and wife, there was no more happy face present than that of Old Moscow, though he could as yet scarcely move for his wounds.

Winter, however, found him busy with his traps, and he continued to follow his accustomed calling, varied now and then by the adventurous life of an Indian trailer and fighter. His scarred face and form were well-known upon the frontier for many years, as was also his character for truth and matchless bravery, and

every one of white blood was thankful that his trail of life had not reached

THE END.

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